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Forest Service NEWS



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9 '86

W-19

10-27-86

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COMPUTERS ACCESS NATIONAL FOREST TRAILS

Hikers and backpackers who use National Forest trails usually know what they want but sometimes don't know where to find it. But this summer, hikers in the Puget Sound area were able to get computerized information concerning 270 trails on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest near Seattle. The success and future of this program are key topics of discussion this week at a Forest Service Regional Recreation Staff Conference in Seattle, WA.

For a 10-1/2-week trial period this summer, current National Forest trail information was available, without cost, through a Trails Information Service (TRIS) computer at the downtown Seattle Public Library or at the downtown Seattle Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI) store. This project was a cooperative effort between the Seattle Public Library, REI, and the USDA Forest Service. It was financed in part by a Seattle Public Library grant.

Dave Scott, Director of Recreation for the Forest Service Pacific Northwest Region, says that TRIS was a pilot program that is being evaluated now. "We hope to expand the concept to other National Forests," Scott said. "We're looking at opportunities to expand the menu to include other information options about recreation, firewood, contract announcements, etc. The use of public access computer bulletin boards is also being considered."

(more)

The TRIS program offers a menu from which hikers can ask a number of questions about trail environments, their distance from Seattle, their length, their difficulty and any special facilities that might be available. The hiker makes selections from a menu on a form and feeds that into a computer. The computer then matches requests against information in the data bank to select options that most closely answer the inquiry.

For example, hikers with children may be looking for an easy one-day hike near home with possible fishing spots. Veteran hikers, however, may desire more remote locations with camping opportunities and physical challenges. Or an individual may simply want the latest information about trail conditions on their favorite trail.

A typical TRIS printout shows the trail number and name, its length and elevation, location from Seattle in time and distance and describes the major highway access route. It also indicates the trail difficulty and relative volume of use.

So that the hiker knows what to expect, trail difficulty is expressed as easy (maximum pitch 20%), more difficult (maximum pitch 30%) and most difficult (pitch +30% with no graded trail except where slope is over 50%). All printouts include advice on equipment needs and warnings about risks.

Following completion of the pilot program in Seattle, Doug McWilliams, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Supervisor, said that approximately 5,000 people in the Seattle area used the TRIS program this summer. "TRIS is an excellent example of how the private sector and a public agency can cooperate to create a quality service for all," he said.

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The computer shown here at the downtown Seattle Recreation Equipment Inc. (REI) store is one of three in Seattle to offer the "Trail Information System" (TRIS) used this year for the first time with great success. TRIS is given a tryout by Pacific Northwest Regional Forester Jim Torrence while Alan Abe (left), REI promotion coordinator, and Roger Neale, REI downtown store manager, stand by.

— photo by Penny Falknor, USDA Forest Service



Pacific Northwest Regional Forester Jim Torrence tries out the new "Trail Information System" (TRIS) at the USDA Forest Service/National Park Service Information Center in downtown Seattle. TRIS has been available this summer for use by the public at three locations in Seattle. Penny Falknor, information specialist, and Dale Potter, assistant recreation staff, both employed by the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, are pleased at the success of TRIS.

— photo by Kathy Duyungen-Albert, USDA Forest Service

